

Same Sex Marriage Referendum Challenge Filed

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Challengers of Washington's newly signed gay-marriage bill have filed a referendum challenge. Less than four hours after Gov. Chris Gregoire signed into law the bill authorizing civil marriage for same-sex couples, SB6239, Joseph Backholm of Preserve Marriage Washington filed Referendum 73 seeking to overturn the law. Backholm, who has the backing of a number of in-state and national organizations, said it will be an expensive and hard-fought campaign, but that he expects to prevail. "I don't think it's that hard of a case to make," he told reporters at the Office of Secretary of State. "There are lots of meaningful relationships that are not called marriage. Marriage should be reserved for a man and a woman and the children they raise." Christopher Plante of the National Organization for Marriage, said each side will spend \$2 million-\$6 million getting their message out. Backholm said "I'm very confident." The referendum simply takes the exact language of the bill that the Legislature passed and Gregoire signed, and places it on the ballot. - David Ammons, Office of Secretary of State

Ammons said the voter's choice will be to affirm the law or to reject it — so essentially the sponsors who are bringing the referendum forward will be asking for a "reject" vote on their own measure. Supporters of gay marriage will be asking for a vote to affirm the law. Several hundred cheering partisans, and one heckler, crowded into the ornate State Reception Room for the governor's bill-signing ceremony.

Sen. Ed Murray and Rep. Jamie Pedersen, both Seattle Democrats from the 43rd District, the prime sponsors, spoke before Gregoire took the podium to loud cheers and the chant "Gregoire! Gregoire! Gregoire." She was flanked by many of the legislators who voted for the measure during the past two weeks. Crowds lined the balconies and steps of the Rotunda, watching on closed-circuit TV. Gregoire, emotional at times, said it was a proud and defining moment for civil rights in Washington, and predicted that if the measure is placed on the ballot as a referendum, voters will uphold it, as they did R-71, the "everything but marriage" law in 2009. Her statement: <http://tinyurl.com/7dkxcnh> Challengers attempted to file a ballot challenge before Gregoire had acted on the bill, and were asked to come back later in the day. Backholm and other supporters returned at 3:30 and after interviews, Backholm signed his paperwork and paid his filing fee with a \$5 bill. It takes 120,577 valid signatures of registered Washington voters to secure a place on the ballot. The Elections Division suggests submitting at least 150,000 to cover invalid or duplicate signatures. The signature deadline is June 6. If signatures are turned in, that suspends the new law from taking effect as scheduled on June 7. If the challengers don't turn in enough signatures, the marriage law would go into effect then. If the challengers qualify for the ballot, then the law would stay on hold until the Nov. 6 election and certification on Dec. 6. Some FAQs: <http://tinyurl.com/7drjq4c> Also, Stephen Pidgeon, a candidate for attorney general and an anti-gay marriage activist, has filed Initiative 1192 to essentially pose the same question to Washington voters. His measure would restate the law as it exists before the new gay-marriage law — that marriage is defined as the union of one man and one woman, with other civil unions barred. He has not been able to start collecting signatures yet because he and foes of his initiative have both

challenged the ballot title prepared by the Attorney General's Office. David Ammons
Communications Director Office of Secretary of State